

Options for CRP Mid Contract Management

Iowa Job Sheet

Natural Resources Conservation Service
Des Moines, Iowa

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Purpose

Mid contract management (MCM) will be conducted on certain Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general sign up practices. The purpose of MCM is to manage established plant communities in order to maintain an early successional stage. Management will:

- Increase plant community species and structural diversity.
- Provide wildlife habitat for those species that use early successional stage vegetative habitat.
- Provide habitat for declining species.
- Remove duff and control woody vegetation.

Where it applies

MCM is required on certain CRP contracts entered into during sign up 26 or subsequent sign ups. MCM applies to many CRP practices. (See your conservation plan for more details.) MCM will be applied to every acre at least once during the contract life. Cost share for MCM is available for any CRP acres where MCM is an option.

How it helps

Managing plant communities is beneficial if not essential for less mobile animal species. The less mobile the species of wildlife, the more important it is to provide all the life cycle habitat requirements for multiple species in a small area (songbirds, quail, and pheasants).

MCM will be designed to achieve the desired plant community in density, vertical and horizontal structure, and plant species diversity needed by the targeted wildlife species.

Methods used will be designed to maintain soil and water quality criteria.

Prior to interseeding, the existing vegetation must be weakened. This will promote the establishment of the interseeded species. For CRP, the stand may be weakened by disking, prescribed fire or chemical application. Managed haying or grazing, if allowed, are also acceptable. MCM should not be used more than once every three years on the same location in a field.

Management options

NRCS Standards and Specifications will be used to apply options. Applying an option may involve multiple activities. See the applicable Standard for the activities to be completed for the chosen option.

Shallow Disking (meaning 2-4" deep) of existing stands (three years and older) may be necessary to increase the amount of open ground and encourage a diverse plant community of annual and perennial plants. Disk up to one-third of the field at a time. Disking for MCM can be done from Aug. 2-Sept. 30 or from Oct. 1-May 14. Rotate the disked areas in strips or blocks no more than 75 feet wide across the field, following the CRP conservation plan. An area

twice the width of the disked area should be left between the strips or blocks. Repeat process in successive years until entire field has been disked.

Site conditions or equipment utilized may require more than one pass to achieve desired habitat conditions. The disked area should provide no more than 50 percent bare ground **leaving at least 50 percent ground cover of residue** to prevent soil erosion. Follow NRCS Early Successional Habitat Management Standard (647).

Prescribed Burning is used to remove excess litter, which may reduce the quality of wildlife habitat. Controlled fire can allow germination of seed bearing annuals, increase plant species diversity, control unwanted woody cover, and open up the stand for movement of small animals and birds. Follow the NRCS Prescribed Burning Standard (338).

When wildlife is a primary concern, the NRCS 338 Standard states that no more than one-third of the field should be burned at one time. However, for CRP purposes, FSA allows an exception to the standard and the entire field may be burned. Any burns must be done according to a Prescribed Burn Plans that meet the technical specifications of the Iowa NRCS conservation practice standard 338-Prescribed Burning.

Selected Herbicides may manipulate plant succession and improve habitat diversity. Recommendation is to treat up to one-third of a field at a time. Spraying for MCM is allowed from Aug. 2 to Sept. 30 from Oct. 1 to May 14.

For cool season introduced grass stands, spraying should be done either in blocks or strips up to 50 feet wide, interspersed with non-treated blocks or strips equal to twice the sprayed strip width. Repeat process in successive years until entire field has been sprayed.

Stands of native grasses or mixed stands of grasses and forbs should be sprayed in narrow strips less than 2 feet wide with a much wider, at least 10 feet wide, unsprayed strip in between. This can be accomplished by turning off nozzles on the booms. The entire width of the strip covered by the sprayer pass is considered a treated strip for MCM.

Careful planning and care in application are required in the use of chemicals to improve existing habitat. Selection of products should be based on several factors including product effectiveness, non-target species impact, toxicological risks, and off-site movement of chemicals. All spraying should be done according to the lowest label rate which will accomplish the desired treatment conditions.

Follow both NRCS Pest Management Standard (595) and label precautions This option is not applicable to CP25) (Prairie Restoration) or to CP 38E (Rare and Declining Habitats).

Interseeding may be used to enhance existing cover. The addition of introduced legumes such as alfalfa, ladino or red clovers, or native legumes and forbs such black-eyed susan, partridge pea, white or purple prairie clover, tick trefoil, Illinois bundle flower, etc., will add diversity and structure to existing cover. Interseeding may be used in conjunction with any of the above MCM options or used as a stand alone single MCM option. (Note requirement for stand weakening prior to interseeding.)

Follow NRCS Conservation Cover Standard (327) for seeding dates and interseeding methods. It is recommended that forbs or legumes be interseeded at 25 percent of the pure seeding rate for introduced legumes and 10 seeds/sq. ft. for native forbs or legumes.

Other Requirements

No MCM option may be applied during the May 15 to August 1 primary nesting season.

Managed haying or grazing except for CP25 and CP38E -Rare and Declining Habitats (with 25 percent payment reduction) may be used to reduce duff prior to light disking, spraying or interseeding.

Measures must be provided to control noxious weeds and other invasive species.

To protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife and provide insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds shall be done on a “spot” basis.

All habitat manipulations will be planned and managed according to soil capabilities and recommendations for management that will maintain soil loss within the tolerable (T) limit.

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